

Prevention

Double your

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Pleasure

It's good for
your health

Coffee +
chocolate
is to health what
water + sunshine
is to flowers.
9 delightful duos
that nourish
your mind,
body and soul.

by Nancy Kalish and
Benita Sen

photographs by
Stephanie Rausser

What's so great about your weekend dinner-and-a-movie date, a leisurely nap and good sex? More than just the pleasures they afford, we

crave these pastimes because they're essential to our physical and mental well-being. "We tend to think good health requires hard work," says Susan Love, MD, the famed breast cancer expert and co-author of *Live a Little! Breaking the Rules Won't Break Your Health*. "We forget that the very things that make us happy, make us pretty healthy too." Every day, new information emerges on the health benefits of plain old fun. Dr Nandini Chatterjee Singh, associate professor, National Brain Research Centre, Gurgaon, points out that one should make time to do things that bring happiness. "You work much better when you are happy and that happiness is infectious and spreads quickly to people in your surroundings," she says. If you're not already living for pleasure, here are some surprisingly easy ways to get on with the plan, along with simple feel-good tweaks that will not only double your pleasure but also double your health. How much fun is that?!

Pleasure 1
PRINCIPLE

Indulge in Fun Foods

- **Refuel with iced coffee.** Ignore the coffee police: there's no reason to skip your afternoon pick-me-up. Caffeine helps prevent DNA damage that leads to skin cancer, according to leading dermatologists. Your favourite brew is also a bounty of anti-oxidants. People who down 3 to 4 cups daily have a 25% lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those who drink less, according to an analysis of more than 450,000 people. "To get the most out of each cup choose a dark roast," suggests Dave Grotto, RD, author of *101 Optimal Life foods*, "as it contains more bioactive compounds." It will also leave you fresher and more alert. A study to evaluate the effects of napping, caffeine and napping plus caffeine on performance and alertness in night shift workers showed that napping, caffeine and their combination all improved alertness and performance.
- ⊕ **Double your pleasure:** Savour a

square of dark chocolate with your cappuccino. The confection boosts blood vessel function by a whopping 129%.

- **Eating red meat** in moderation can be fine since it gives you brain-boosting Omega-3 fatty acids and zinc, which strengthens bones. However, you need to avoid heterocyclic amines, or HCAs (carcinogenic chemicals that develop when animal products are charred). Ishi Khosla, clinical nutritionist & director, Whole Foods India suggests avoiding charcoal broiling. Instead, reduce formation of HCAs by cooking meat wrapped in aluminum foil. If you must grill it, precook the meat to reduce the grilling time. Include garlic, ginger and turmeric in the recipe since they block HCA carcinogenesis. A study by the Cancer Research Centre of Hawaii found that steaks bathed overnight in garlic and turmeric marinade had 50% fewer harmful compounds when cooked for 15 minutes.
- ⊕ **Double your pleasure:** Serve a tasty potato salad on the side. When

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CRUNCH SOME
POPCORN WHILE
CATCHING A FLICK TO
BOOST FIBRE INTAKE

most spuds are boiled and chilled, they form a type of fibre called resistant starch that may block your body's ability to burn carbohydrates. The benefit to you: you burn more belly fat.

● **Sip some red wine occasionally.**

It boosts cardiovascular health, thanks to the resveratrol. Make it into a punch for the added anti-oxidants from fruits and juices.

⊕ **Double your pleasure:** Serve with homemade Handvo. Dr Sonia Kakar, nutrition & health specialist, Country Director, Project HOPE, India Diabetes Program suggests a special recipe for Handvo that is as tasty as it is healthy, high in fibre, protein and low in fat. Combine half a cup each of channa dal and rice, soaked in water for six hours and ground to a thick paste. Leave it to ferment overnight. To the fermented batter, add grated lauki (bottle gourd),

chopped coriander leaves and half a tablespoon of curd, salt and chilli powder to taste. Season with a teaspoon each of sesame seeds and crushed peanuts in soyabean oil. Grease a platter, pour out the batter and steam for about 30 minutes. Slice into wedges—and enjoy!

● **Snack on steamed corn (minus the butter).** You probably don't think of this summer staple as a health food. But corn is full of resistant starch (a kind of fibre) and phenolic compounds, both of which help prevent colon cancer.

⊕ **Double your pleasure:** Grotto loves to spread this Mexican-style topping on his corn: mix mayonnaise made with canola oil (full of healthy monounsaturated fat) with some calcium-laden Parmesan and a pinch of cayenne pepper, which contains capsaicin, a compound that fights skin cancer, reduces appetite and increases fat metabolism.

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Pleasure PRINCIPLE 2

Schedule Play Dates (& Mental Health Breaks)

● **Turn to the tube to laugh.** Catch the latest laughter show on the idiot box or book tickets for the latest comedy flick. Says Dr Jitendra Nagpal, senior consultant psychiatrist, Moolchand Medcity & VIMHANS, New Delhi and



Programme Director of Expressions India (The Life Skill Education, School Health & Community Wellness Programme), “Laughter reduces the harmful stress hormone cortisol and relaxes the blood vessels.”

In fact, a study shows that a good chuckle is as good for blood vessel health as aerobic exercise. After just 15 minutes of laughing at a funny film, subjects’ blood vessels relaxed and expanded, improving their flexibility and providing them more protection against heart disease.

A hearty laugh leaves you feeling positive and improves interpersonal relations and gives you better self-esteem, according to Nagpal. “There is no medicine like laughter therapy which gives such instant results,” Nagpal adds. Nothing like a dose of laughter to kick-start your day and to keep you feeling better—laughter club, anyone?

➕ **Double your pleasure:** Munch on some popcorn while you watch the tube. This snack is high in fibre and anti-oxidants that help reduce cancer risk and improve heart health.

● **Take a guiltless siesta.** If you love to nap, you’re in good company. Winston Churchill, JFK, and Albert Einstein were all fans of an afternoon snooze. Perhaps they knew what recent research has found: napping increases learning power. Adds Dr Suresh Kumar, consultant in neurology & sleep medicine, Fortis Malar Hospital and clinical director, Chennai Epilepsy and Sleep Disorders Centre, “Naps or daytime sleep of less than an hour enhances alertness and attention, plus allows some forms of memory consolidation.”

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HOW EXPERTS **Live It Up****I love to be close to nature**

Being close to nature lifts my mood, so I go trekking whenever I get a chance. A good game of badminton every morning releases the much-needed happy hormones for me. Reading a book or listening to music is also a stress buster.

— DR ANIL MISHRA, medical director and senior consultant interventional cardiologist, BM Birla Heart Research Centre, Kolkata

Time with family is the best treat

Nothing like periodic breaks from work to spend one-on-one time with family. I especially love playing with my dogs. Teeing off once a while is also a great mood lifter.

— DR PERVEZ AHMED, CEO and MD, Max Healthcare, New Delhi

A job well done makes me happy

I feel most happy to see the smile on my patients face when they see a positive report after their infertility treatment.

Honestly, it makes my day. Helping to make a difference, always brings its own happiness.

— DR DURU SHAH, gynaecologist and infertility expert, chairperson, Gynaecworld, Mumbai

➤ **Double your pleasure:** Download an MP3 song list with three or four of your favourite blissful tunes you can listen to while you drift off. Multiple studies show that music is a major relaxant, relieving stress, slowing heart rate, and lowering blood pressure.

● **Savour a stroll.** It may feel more like fun than exercise, but a moderately paced walk still provides cardiovascular and calorie-burning benefits. And that's not all. A moderate walk of 30 minutes, several times a week can be good for the brain. Vinata Shetty, Reebok Master Trainer reminds us, "Walking requires neuro-muscular coordination. The central nervous system comprising the brain and spinal cord recruit the appropriate muscle groups at the right time to bring about a coordinated movement. So there is an increase in brain/neuro-

logical activity." Walk for the pleasure of walking and for fitness, rather than just to reduce weight. Dr Gaurav Sharma, sports medicine specialist from New Delhi, points out that regular walking (or any other form of exercise) is good for the brain cells because natural opioids like endorphins, dynorphins and enkephalins are released during this activity.

➤ **Double your pleasure:** Boost your endurance with some up-tempo tunes. Energising music can help you work out longer. Says Sharma, "You can exercise longer to your favourite music." People who synchronised their walking pace to music with at least 125 beats per minute (think: *Clocks* by Coldplay or *Shut Up and Drive* by Rihanna) increased their endurance by 15%, although they felt they were actually reducing their effort 10%.

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Pleasure
PRINCIPLE 3

Stay Intimately Connected

● **Get a little frisky between the sheets.** Perhaps the sexiest health news ever: regular orgasms provide remarkable physical benefits. People who have more frequent sex have lower blood pressure, half the risk of fatal heart attacks, sounder sleep, less pain, and better immunity. No surprise: their marriages benefit too. And remember, getting hot and heavy can burn lots of calories.

➕ **Double your pleasure:** When you are not in bed, spend the weekend hanging out with your partner. According to a just-published study in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, people who spent Friday evening to Sunday afternoon leisurely with loved ones experienced better moods, greater vitality, and fewer aches and pains. Schedule a recreation that's new to both of you—whether learning to play tennis or attending a modern dance performance. Novel experiences stimulate brain growth.

● **Dance with your star.** Take some lessons with your spouse. Points out Dilshad Patel, dance/movement therapist and wellness consultant, Mumbai, “Dancing is a form of non-verbal communication that bonds two people at a deeper level. We have an innate ability to express emotion and thoughts through the body.” Dancing can be a good workout and fun. It also enhances physical, spacial, social and emotional awareness. “When words fall short, the



movement says it all,” Patel adds. She has seen couples come closer by dancing together. One couple who had not given themselves any fun time together salvaged their chemistry through dance. “When they started, I could see their bodies were not synchronised. Through practice not only did their dancing skills improve but their communication became stronger,” says Patel.

➕ **Double your pleasure:** Enlist your couple friends to join the venture. Having your friends involved will both add to the fun and enhance your commitment to learning the steps. ■

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